

DOMENICO GHIRLANDAIO

AND HIS

Fresco of the Death of S. Francis.



THE SASSETTI CHAPEL.

MOST travellers in Italy know the old bridge—the “Ponte Vecchio”—of Florence, with its quaint jewellers’ shops, which have hung, from time out of mind, over the Arno. In

one of them, according to tradition, Tommaso di Currado Bigordi, a goldsmith of repute, followed his calling in the middle of the fifteenth century. He had shown much skill in chiselling votive offerings and various ornaments for the churches of his native city; and he had become the fashionable jeweller of the day for certain garlands in gold and silver, which were worn in those luxurious times by the Florentine damsels.* He was consequently called "Il Ghirlandaio," or "Grillandaio," the Garland-maker, a name which passed to his descendants.

Tommaso was the father of eight children. Domenico, the eldest, born in 1449, was placed at an early age in the shop to learn his father's trade. But nature had intended him for a painter, not a jeweller. He soon showed his natural inclination by making rapid portraits of those who chanced to pass by his father's shop, instead of minding his work. His education as a jeweller was, indeed, favourable to the development of his talents as a painter, especially as a draughtsman. Many of the greatest artists of the fifteenth century, Ghiberti, Brunelleschi, Masolino, Verrocchio, the Pollaioli, and Botticelli, and even Andrea del Sarto, learnt the first rudiments of their art in the same way. The early practice of modelling and chiselling gives vigour, firmness, and decision to the hand, and to the eye accuracy of judgment as regards outline and a just perception of form. The faculty he had acquired of

* In the severer days of the republic, the use of such ornaments was forbidden by law. "*Quod nulla mulier presumat deferre in capite coronam auream vel argenteam vel aliquem lapidem pretiosum*," said a solemn ordinance (Gaye, *Carteggio*, i. 447). Vasari, in his *Life of Ghirlandaio*, attributes the invention of these garlands to Tommaso, an evident mistake, in which he is followed by Baldiucci in his *Notizie dei Professori del Disegno*.

making portraits from the life led to that feeling for nature, truth, and individuality for which his works afterwards became remarkable. Thus Domenico, without frequenting an academy, attending lectures, or studying from the professional model, laid the best foundation for an artist's successful career. His father was at length convinced that it was useless to keep him to a trade in which he took no delight, and finished by consenting that he should become a painter. But it was necessary that he should study the technical part of his new profession, and for this purpose he appears to have entered the "bottega" of Alessio Baldovinetti, a Florentine master of some fame.

Alessio has been unfortunate in having attributed to him by collectors and connoisseurs a number of pictures of uncommon ugliness, for which some other author could not readily be found. But, in truth, few authentic works by him have been preserved. Almost the only one of any importance is a much injured fresco of the Nativity, in the outer court of the church of the Annunziata at Florence, in which he has borrowed the principal group, the Virgin adoring the new-born Child, from Filippo Lippi. Vasari especially praises it for a truthful and diligent execution of details. A broad landscape, with towns, castles, rivers, and mountains, executed in a very minute but somewhat mechanical and conventional style, and some objects in the foreground well imitated from nature, justify to a certain extent his admiration. The heads, especially those in the ornamental border surrounding the subject, have a vigorous portrait-like character, which reminds one of the works of his distinguished pupil. His outline is, however, hard and dry, especially in his draperies, and his flesh tints have a heavy leaden hue, which

Ghirlandaio himself appears to have unfortunately copied in his tempera pictures.*

But there were models and examples in Florence better than any Alessio could furnish, and of these the young painter appears to have eagerly availed himself. Already, in the first half of the fifteenth century, Masolino and Masaccio had inaugurated a new era in painting by their works in the Brancacci Chapel in the Church of the Carmine. They had been the first since the revival of the arts to attempt successfully a close and truthful imitation of nature, not only in the action of single figures and in the disposition of different groups, but in an individuality of expression given to each actor in the scene represented. In thus adhering to truth they nevertheless selected—and this fact must always be borne in mind—that which was most elevated, dignified, and refined in nature, following her faithfully, but always in her happiest mood and in her most noble development.

The conventional art of the fourteenth century, with its poetry and its deep religious sentiment, was no longer in harmony with the feelings and belief of the age. The earnest faith, the mysticism and superstitions of that century, had been gradually fading away before the more profound study of philosophy and the spread of material civilisation. A new phase of human life required new

* Amongst the very few authentic works by Alessio Baldovinetti is an altar-piece on panel, in very fair preservation, now in the Uffizi, at Florence. It represents the Virgin and Child in the midst of a group of saints, and contains some fine original heads, but is marked by the same heavy leaden tone of colour in the flesh tints, as the fresco. An altar-piece in the National Gallery, attributed to Fra Filippo Lippi, may be in part if not entirely by Alessio. In the latter part of his life, he devoted himself to working in mosaic—an art in which he appears to have attained great proficiency and shown considerable taste.

exponents in art as in literature. In painting it found them in Masolino and Masaccio, in sculpture in Donatello and Ghiberti. As is ever the case, the period of transition had its representative painters, like Fra Angelico and Lorenzo Monaco, who, whilst adhering to the traditions of the past, were unable to resist the influences of the present. But the first who really embodied in their works the true spirit of the age were undoubtedly Masolino and Masaccio. They were followed, but not equalled, by Paolo Uccello and Benozzo Gozzoli—the one a bold and original painter, the other one of great richness of imagination, fertility of invention, and fondness for nature, but occasionally extravagant, and somewhat wanting in the highest qualities of his art.

Domenico Ghirlandaio was probably not much under thirty years of age when he first opened his own “bottega,” or shop—or “studio” as it would be called in these days—as a painter of pictures.* Of his earlier life we have no record of any kind. No authentic work by him bears date before 1480, and nearly all his works are dated, although not one of them, with the exception of a single fresco in the Church of Sta. Maria Novella of Florence, is signed with his name. He had already been thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the works of Masolino and Masaccio in the Brancacci Chapel, which evidently influenced his style from the commencement of his career.† Like those painters, and indeed like

* According to the return or declaration of property (*denunzia de' beni*) made by his father in 1480, Domenico had even then no settled place of abode: “Domenicho mio figliuolo anni 31, è dipintore, non à luogo fermo.” Gaye, i. 266.

† The frescoes in this chapel were still unfinished, Filippino Lippi not having completed them until some years after. The Arundel Society has now secured admirable copies by Sig. Mariannucci of all these great works for publication.

all the great painters of the time of the revival of the arts, he chose fresco as best suited to his genius and to his conception of the highest aim of painting. All his best works are in that material.

Domenico's earliest works, according to Vasari, were some frescoes in the Chapel of the Vespucci family, in the Church of the Ognissanti in his native city. In one of them he introduced the portrait of Amerigo Vespucci, who was destined to give his name to a new world. Amerigo was then twenty-nine years of age, and unknown to fame. These interesting frescoes were destroyed in 1616, less than a century and a half after they had been executed. Probably about the same time, or soon after, he painted the large fresco of "The Last Supper," still existing in the refectory of the convent of the same church, and bearing the date of 1480.* In this work, which is evidently a very early one, there is little attempt at composition, or picturesque grouping of the figures. They are placed at table, as was the custom at that time in such pictures, as if they formed part of the assembly of monks who met in the hall to eat, in solemn silence, their daily meals. The heads, however, are marked by considerable diversity of expression; the various emotions, which the hearers of their Lord's words might be supposed to experience, are portrayed with skill, and in some instances there is much grandeur and elevation of character. These qualities are particularly shown in an apostle leaning his head upon his hand. The drapery, too, is marked by breadth and

* The fresco of "The Cintola," or of the Virgin Mary leaving her girdle when raised to heaven, in the sacristy of the Church of San Niccolò, in Florence, attributed to Ghirlandajo, has been so completely repainted, that it is difficult to say whether or not it is by the master. The date of 1450 now upon it is a bungling addition worthy of a Florentine restorer.

dignity of treatment, and falls in large and well-disposed folds. In the same church, but removed from its original position, is a fresco representing St. Jerome at his desk, also bearing the date of 1480, chiefly remarkable for the careful and minute execution of the details.

The fresco of "The Last Supper," in the refectory of the Convent of St. Mark, at Florence, appears by its style and character to belong to about the same period as that in the Convent of the Ognissanti, which it very closely resembles, especially in the background. The heads in this work have, however, less strength and character, especially that of the Saviour, which is deficient in dignity and grandeur. The composition is even more conventional. In these three works much mastery is already shown over the use of fresco—especially in the "St. Jerome," in which the colours are still remarkably clear, bright, and luminous.

Although Vasari mentions several important works, upon which Domenico Ghirlandaio must at this period have been engaged, such as the story of San Paolino in the Church of Santa Croce, none of them have been preserved. His reputation had now been established, and his fame had spread beyond his native city, for about this time he was invited to Rome, with other great masters of the day, to adorn the chapel recently built by Pope Sixtus IV.*

* Vasari, as usual, has involved the life of Ghirlandaio in inextricable confusion, as far as dates are concerned. He states that the painter was invited to Rome by Sixtus IV., after he had painted the "St. Jerome" in the Church of the Ognissanti, which bears the date of 1480, and yet he places the frescoes of the Sassetti Chapel, finished, according to the date upon them, in 1485, before this work. He also places the picture in the church of the Foundling Hospital at Florence, dated in 1488, before Ghirlandaio's visit to Rome. To

He had been engaged, probably a little earlier, by the Municipality, or Signoria, of Florence, to paint one side of the great hall which contained the celebrated clock of Lorenzo della Volpeia, and was hence called the Sala dell' Orologio, and afterwards the Sala dei Gigli, from the fleurs-de-lys on its remaining walls. That work appears to have been carried on at intervals and was not finished until 1485, as memoranda of payment to him of sums on account between 1481 and that year are still preserved.*

The fresco that Ghirlandaio, in rivalry with his eminent contemporaries, painted in the Sistine Chapel, representing the calling of Peter and Andrew, shows a decided advance on the works he had previously executed. In it he unquestionably displays the powers of a great painter. The influence of Masaccio is very evident in the

add still more to the confusion, he describes, in his life of Cosimo Rosselli, all the painters employed in decorating the Sistine Chapel as working there together, although Sandro Botticelli left Rome before 1480, and Luca Signorelli did not go there until 1483 or 1484. According to the biographer, Francesco Tornabuoni, a wealthy Florentine merchant residing in Rome, was so pleased with some frescoes that Ghirlandaio had painted over the tomb of his wife in the Church of the Minerva, that he gave the painter, on his return to Florence, letters to his relation Giovanni Tornabuoni, who thereupon commissioned Domenico to decorate the chapel of the choir behind the high altar of Sta. Maria Novella. But that great work was not commenced before 1485. I prefer, therefore, to place Ghirlandaio's residence at Rome between 1481 and 1483. Rumohr and Kugler assign an earlier date to it, before the execution of the frescoes in the Ognissanti (Italian Schools of Painting, v. i., p. 209). Baldinucci, on the other hand, by an evident error, says that he painted there after finishing the Sassetti Chapel; Sixtus IV. died in 1484, a year before that chapel was completed. Rosini, in his history of Italian painting (v. iii., p. 141), has fallen into the same mistake. The frescoes in the refectories of the Ognissanti and of St. Mark to my mind show evidence of being earlier works than the great fresco of "The calling of Peter and Andrew" in the Sistine Chapel. It is scarcely probable that he should have been summoned to Rome to enter upon so important a work as the decoration of the new building, unless his reputation had been already established by the execution of some great undertaking, and there is no proof whatever of his having executed any such prior to 1480.

* Gaye, Carteggio, i. 577. 581.

general composition, in the grouping of the figures, in the studied individuality of each head, in the noble and elevated character of the expression, and in the broad and truthful treatment of the drapery. In all these respects he shows himself a follower of that great painter, and of Masolino. At the same time, in the details of the landscape, in which there is an earnest desire to represent nature truthfully, but in a poetical spirit, he is much superior to both masters. He may have profited in this part of his art by the teaching of Alessio Baldovinetti, whom, however, he had already left far behind.

In this work, not inferior in some of the highest qualities of Art to any that adorn the side walls of that celebrated chapel, Ghirlandaio first shows himself a worthy exponent of the spirit of the age in which he lived, by his truthful and simple, yet noble and dignified representation of his subject. The newly-called Apostles kneel before the Saviour, who, accompanied by two followers, forms the centre and principal point of interest of the picture. To the right are many spectators, men, youths, and children, evidently portraits of contemporaries of the painter, dressed in the costume of his time. They contemplate the scene with solemn interest, and are introduced rather to give fulness and richness to the composition than as actors in the event. At the opposite side are other figures less individualised and in more lively action. In the distance two other parts of the same story, with the same principal actors, are represented, in accordance with the custom of the period. The background consists of a beautiful landscape, with a lake, hills, a walled town, castles, and various buildings—all represented with good effect, and with a knowledge of perspective in advance of the painters who had preceded him.

The "Resurrection of Christ," which he painted on the wall to the right of the principal entrance of the same chapel, appears to have been partly destroyed not very long after its completion. It was entirely repainted less than a century later by a Flemish painter, who was known in Italy as Arrigo Fiammingo.*

On his return to Florence, Ghirlandaio finished the fresco begun four years before in the hall of the Palazzo Vecchio, and commenced another great work, the decoration of a chapel for the Sassetti family in the Church of the *Stma. Trinità*. The painting in the *Sala dell' Orologio* consists of a grand and very elaborate architectural design in the Renaissance, or revived classic style, into which are introduced figures larger than life of San Zanobi, a patron saint of the city, enthroned, and two other saints. Behind them are seen the Duomo, the Campanile and the Baptistery. Two lions, in *chiaroscuro*, bear standards with the arms of the people and magistracy of Florence. Above, also in *chiaroscuro*, are six single figures of illustrious characters chosen from Roman history, and a lunette with the Virgin and Child, for whom the painter has chosen types of beauty and grace rarely seen in his pictures of the Holy Family. The whole composition is strictly architectural and decorative, and the subject is not one which would call forth the peculiar abilities of the painter. The figures are, however, treated with grandeur and dignity, and the work displays Domenico's usual skill in the practice of fresco.†

* Lanzi, v. ii. p. 129. Of the four subjects from the lives of the Virgin and John the Baptist, which, according to Vasari, he painted over the tomb of the wife of Francesco Tornabuoni, in the Church of the Minerva, at Rome, not a trace now remains.

† Ghirlandaio received sixty florins for the figure of San Zanobi. He was assisted in the work by one Sandro Marini. Gaye, i. 578.

On the 15th December, 1485, as an inscription still testifies, Ghirlandaio completed the frescoes which adorn the Sassetti Chapel. Francesco Sassetti wishing to raise a becoming monument to himself and his wife, Madonna Nera, employed the painter, whose fame was now very great, to paint the walls of the chapel in which they were to be buried, with the history of his patron saint, St. Francis of Assisi. "This work," Vasari says, "Ghirlandaio executed with wonderful ability, and with the utmost grace, tenderness, and love." In addition to six events in the history of the saint, he painted in fresco the portraits of Francesco Sassetti and his wife, admirably true to life, kneeling on either side of the altar, and, as was customary, a large picture on "tavola," or panel, and in tempera, representing the Nativity of Christ, to be placed upon it. The remains of the noble Florentine and his wife were subsequently deposited in two urns of black marble, in opposite vaulted recesses. The arches of these recesses are exquisitely carved with groups of figures and arabesques of classic character; whether designed or not by the painter I am ignorant. The chapel is still preserved without much alteration, except the removal of Ghirlandaio's altar-piece.*

The vaulted roof is divided into four compartments by ribs painted with garlands of flowers and fruit. In each compartment is painted a sybil—then a very common mode of decorating the ceilings of chapels. On the outside of the arch facing the church was a fresco of the Tiburtine Sybil announcing the coming of Christ

* This picture is now in the gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts, and also bears the date of 1485. For a general view of the chapel and its present contents, see woodcut from a drawing by Mrs. Higford Burr, at the head of this notice.

to the Emperor Augustus, much praised by Vasari for its brilliant and admirable colouring, but of which no traces now remain. The frescoes representing the history of the saint are six in number, and are unequal in merit, the painter having evidently been much assisted in some of them by his scholars. They have suffered from long neglect and the usual ill treatment, but are nevertheless for the most part fairly preserved, especially the most important and interesting of the series, "The Death of St. Francis," which the Arundel Society has selected for publication.*

The first in the series (filling the upper compartment on the left hand wall) represents the Saint renouncing his family and patrimony, and throwing himself naked at the feet of the Bishop of Assisi. The story is well told. The composition is simple and natural. The principal actors in the scene are the Bishop and the young enthusiast, whose father is restrained from advancing towards him by the bystanders. A number of persons, probably contemporaries of the painter, are introduced as spectators. In the next fresco the Saint is seen receiving, from a miraculous appearance of the crucified Saviour, the "stigmata," or the marks of His wounds, whilst a friar gazes with amazement upon the appa-

* The chromolith has been executed with their usual skill by Messrs. Storch and Kramer, of Berlin, under the superintendence of Professor Gruner, from an admirable copy by Sig. Mariannucci. These frescoes, as well as those behind the high altar of Sta. Maria Novella, have been copied and engraved by the two Lasinio. But the engravings, like all those executed by the same hands, are deficient in spirit, and fail to give the true character of the originals, especially in the heads. Still the Lasinios deserve great praise for their laudable attempts to preserve records of some of the most important remains of early Italian art, which they saw perishing around them at a time when there was but little feeling in Italy for such things, and public taste had not yet learnt to appreciate their interest and value.

rition. This subject is somewhat meagre and unsatisfactory in treatment, and has been much and very badly restored and repainted. In the third compartment St. Francis presents the rules of his newly established order to Pope Honorius III. In this composition the painter has endeavoured to represent as closely as possible the simplest conception of such an event. The Pope, enthroned, receives the document from the kneeling Saint. The cardinals are seated in two rows, extending across the picture, one row turning their backs upon the spectator. Groups of persons in the costume of the fifteenth century witness the ceremony, whilst others, ascending a flight of steps, in the immediate foreground, have only their heads and shoulders above the lower line of the picture, a mode of introducing figures more than once adopted by Ghirlandaio, but not always with good effect. In this fresco are many portraits of eminent Florentines, amongst whom Vasari records that of Lorenzo the Magnificent. In order to give still more reality to the scene, Ghirlandaio has represented it as occurring in the square of the Palazzo Vecchio, near the old palace itself and the celebrated Loggie of Bernardo Orcagna.*

Beneath this fresco is represented the Saint suddenly appearing and restoring to life a child of the Spini family, who had been killed by falling from a window. The child, seated upon a bier, is surrounded by groups of women and citizens, amongst whom the painter has introduced, as was his wont, several members of the Sassetti family, and many of his contemporaries. In the background he has represented the Church of the Stma. Trinità, with its

* Documents recently discovered prove that these Loggie were built not by Andrea, to whom they had been from time immemorial attributed, but by his brother Bernardo.

ancient façade, and some buildings which still exist. In the distance is seen the roadway over the bridge in perspective.

The fifth fresco represents St. Francis before the Sultan of Syria, offering to prove, by passing through fire, his divine mission. The last is the death of the Saint, and is not only the most important and interesting of the series, but the one which, perhaps more than any other of his works, combines the highest qualities of Ghirlandaio as a fresco painter.* The body of the dying Saint, wrapped in the coarse garment of his order, is stretched upon a bier. His disciples gather round him. One looks with an expression of most lively grief into the face of his expiring master. Others, kneeling, press his hands and feet to their lips with deep emotion. A citizen, in the dress of the painter's time, opens the garment of the Saint, and places a finger on the miraculous wound in his side. Another, amazed at the sight of the "stigmata," turns to a friar behind him. At the head of the bier stands a bishop, with spectacled nose, chanting the office for the dead.† On either

* Kugler observes of this fresco, (*Schools of Painting in Italy*, v. i., p. 210):—"The Death of the Saint is the most beautiful of these pictures, and one of the few really historical works of Ghirlandaio. The simple, solemn arrangement of the whole; the artless, unaffected dignity of the single figures; the noble, manly expression of sorrowing sympathy; the perfection of the execution—combine to place this picture among the most excellent of modern art."

† Vasari, *Life of Ghirlandaio*, says, in his quaint way, of this capital figure and of one of the friars—"A friar is seen kissing the Saint's hand, so admirably represented that it would be impossible better to describe the scene in painting. There is also a bishop in his robes with spectacles on his nose, chanting the vigils for the dead. It is only because we do not hear his voice that we are at last persuaded that he is but a picture." The heads of the bishop, and of the priest standing at his left side, are now published, in facsimile from the originals, by the Arundel Society. Such reproductions are valuable to those who would study the handling of the ancient masters, and their mode of executing their subjects in fresco.

side of him is a priest, one bearing a censer, the other ready to sprinkle the corpse with holy water. At the other end of the bier are three acolytes, carrying a cross and lighted torches. Several citizens of Florence, also in the costume of Ghirlandaio's day, appear as spectators. The one in the red headdress immediately behind the bishop is the painter himself. He has frequently thus introduced his own portrait into his works. The background consists of an apse with an altar, and an open colonnade of classic architecture, through which is seen a distant landscape of hill, plain, and river.

The composition of this fine fresco has been justly admired for its simplicity and truth, and, at the same time, for the very skilful arrangement of the figures. It is worthy of note, that Ghirlandaio has followed in it, with little variation, a traditional representation of the subject. The earliest example of it is, I believe, Giotto's fresco in the Bardi Chapel in the Church of Santa Croce, at Florence, the walls of which were until recently covered with the usual coat of whitewash. The great painter had there represented the death of the same Saint, a subject which, from the influence St. Francis had exercised over the whole Catholic world, was one of the most popular of the age. It will be seen by the accompanying woodcut, that not only the general composition, but even the choice and arrangement of the figures are nearly the same as in Ghirlandaio's fresco. Indeed, almost the only change Ghirlandaio has made is the transfer from one side of the bier to the other of the citizen who exposes the miraculous wound of the Saint, and the omission of one of the kneeling friars, in order to avoid the monotony of a repetition of two figures in nearly the same relative position. Giotto had,

however, a reason for introducing four kneeling figures—they suited his idea of symmetry, and at the same time indicated that there were four “stigmata” on the hands and feet of the Saint. He has introduced his own contemporaries as spectators of the event, giving them the dress of his time, as Ghirlandaio has depicted that of a later period. It is possible that even Giotto may have taken the composition from some earlier painter, who had attempted to represent truthfully, but rudely, an event which had occurred during his own lifetime, and of which he may have received a description from an eye-witness. But the general arrangement of the figures, the inimitable truth and simplicity of the expression, and the admirable manner, so true to nature, in which the story is told, bear evidence of Giotto’s own invention. He was followed in this mode of representing similar subjects by many painters and sculptors. Ghirlandaio himself repeated it, with some little variation, in a fresco of “The Death of Sta. Fina,” painted for the Collegiate Church of San Geminiano; it was imitated to a certain extent by Fra Filippo Lippi, in his fine fresco of the death of St. Stephen, in the Duomo of Prato; and even by Andrea del Sarto, in the fresco at the Annunziata, representing the miracle of the raising to life of two children. Amongst the sculptors of the fifteenth century, Benedetto da Maiano almost copied it in one of his bas-reliefs on the pulpit of the Church of Sta. Croce, at Florence. Each artist, as he borrowed the idea, enlarged or endeavoured to improve upon it, seeking to render it as perfect as possible; although, indeed, in many respects there was little to improve in Giotto’s admirable composition. Thus we find that progress mainly consists in the development of that which has gone before rather than in purely original invention, and is as slow

and gradual in the fine arts as it is in every other branch of human knowledge.

As Ghirlandaio had not disdained to take, like other eminent masters, the composition of his fresco from an earlier painter, so his general treatment, as I have already observed, is evidently founded upon the works of Masolino and Masaccio. But by his earnest seeking after truth and nature, and by his power of representing them worthily, he advanced his art both in the technical part and in those higher qualities which should distinguish it. Ghirlandaio thus placed himself in the front rank amongst those artists who were the especial exponents of the most dignified manners, the most enlightened opinions, and the noblest sentiments of the Florentine citizen of the second half of the fifteenth century. It is thus that the truly great painter is the one who portrays with his brush, as the truly great poet is the one who describes in his verse, the best moral and intellectual features of the age in which he lives. If these features be really great and noble, and therefore for ever worthy of admiration, the poet sings and the painter paints for all time. If they be not, they sing and paint for their generation alone.

Ghirlandaio's "Death of St. Francis" is one of those works of the fifteenth century which is especially characteristic of an epoch in the history of painting, when the imitation of nature was no longer controlled by the conventional and religious spirit which had distinguished the fourteenth century, and had not yet yielded to the influence of the academies, who took their models from the stagnant pools of artificial life, and not from the fresh and living springs of

nature. In the works of the painters of this period, and especially in those of Masaccio, Ghirlandaio, and the two Lippi, we have the source from which Raphael, and the greatest masters of the golden age of painting, drew some of their noblest inspirations, when they combined with the strictest imitation of nature the most poetical and elevated treatment of it, and before they felt the influence of the new and evil taste gathering around them. Yet how essentially do they differ in spirit and conception, and indeed in every particular and detail, from those modern works to which it has been the fashion to apply the epithet of "Pre-Raphaelite!" In them, that which should be the principal object and end of the painter is never made secondary and subservient to insignificant and meaningless details. Whilst nothing that may add to the interest or effect of the whole is neglected, everything holds its relative place. To every object is given just the importance which may be due to it, and no more. The first aim of the painter is to place before the spectator, in the most intelligible and simple form, yet with the highest degree of dignity and *grace*, compatible with a strict adherence to nature and truth, the story which he has to tell, the sentiments and emotions he has to express. He then adds such details and accessories, and only such, as are absolutely necessary to make the story complete, and to give to it the impress of reality. He feels that any overloading or overcrowding of them—any attempt to give more importance to them than they would have in a scene of every-day life, would detract from that aspect of reality. Whilst he knows that even the best development of human nature may be disfigured by vulgar and ignoble details, he endeavours, like the true poet, to keep them out of view as much as may be consistent with truth, or to make them so subordinate to the main

action, or subject, that they only serve to add grandeur and dignity to it. Whilst ugliness and deformity are as characteristic of the physical condition of man, as depravity and vice are of his moral state, he seeks only to represent that which is beautiful, good, and noble; thus always striving to elevate and chasten that which he touches. These are the principles, whether as regards composition, the selection of types of female beauty and of manly dignity, the arrangement of drapery and the choice of accessories, which guided the painters of the fifteenth century, who prepared the way for Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and the great masters of the beginning of the sixteenth. They are precisely those which are most neglected, or rather, it would seem, intentionally reversed by the modern followers of the so-called "Pro-Raphaelite" schools.

In Ghirlandaio's fresco we see these principles strikingly illustrated. The painter, having chosen the composition which seemed to him best suited to his subject, seeks to give every actor in the scene represented, by expression and action, his relative place in the story. This he has accomplished with admirable skill and judgment. The dying Saint is the centre of interest. The hue of death has already crept over his wan and sunken features. Nearest to him are those disciples who would be most deeply affected by his death, and who testify the depth of their feelings by the liveliest outward signs of grief. Those further off are less moved, whilst the citizens, who stand around as spectators, show only a manly, sober sorrow becoming the solemn occasion. The bishop, his priests and the acolytes, called in to perform the last rites over the expiring Saint, are, by a fine touch of satire, represented as cold and indifferent to what is passing around them, and as merely hurrying

through an accustomed and tedious duty. To bring the scene still more vividly before those for whom he especially painted, Ghirlandaio has introduced into his picture men of the period in which he lived, dressed in their own costume, and has placed them in an edifice of his own day, instead of attempting to represent the architecture of the time and place in which the event really occurred.*

This custom of introducing the portraits of living persons into pictures painted in public places, such as churches and town-halls, was followed by nearly all the great painters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, from Giotto to Raphael. Whilst a worthy memorial is thus preserved of the illustrious men who may have lived in the painter's day, great truth and apparent reality are given to the scene represented, and a corresponding effect is produced upon the mind of the spectator.

The admirable technical qualities of this work, as indeed of nearly all Ghirlandaio's frescoes, cannot be too highly praised, or too strongly recommended for study to those who are pursuing this branch of their art. He was essentially a painter in fresco, looking upon this material as the one best adapted to the display of his own powers, and to the attainment of the great object and end of painting—the instruction and refinement, as well as the amusement, of mankind. There is no careless work, nor any

* The spot where St. Francis died is now covered by the fine Church of *S. Maria degli Angeli*, at the foot of the hill on which Assisi is built. The hut in which the Saint lived still stands beneath the dome of the modern church, and is an object of peculiar veneration to all the Roman Catholic world.

over-careful and too minute. The effect required is perfectly attained. The colours are now dim, and the "intonaco" or plaster has in parts fallen away, but this is the result of wilful neglect and ill treatment, and not any carelessness in the execution, or any badness in the materials used by the painter. The general tone of colouring is sober and truthful, and admirably suited to the subject. The subtle gradations of tints, and the manner in which he has arranged the bright colours in sufficient quantities to break the monotony of the sombre garments of the friars who are the principal figures, show the consummate skill of the master.

After he had completed the frescoes of the Stma. Trinitá, Ghirlandaio was engaged with his favourite pupil and brother-in-law, Bastiano Mainardi, in painting the Chapel of Sta. Fina in the Collegiate Church of San Geminiano.* There, in the death of the Virgin Saint, he has shown the same mastery over his art as in the death of St. Francis. The figures are smaller, but the composition, as I have already observed, is nearly similar. He has, however, introduced into it several graceful female forms which make a pleasing variety. The girl stretched upon the bier is a figure of singular beauty and of touching simplicity. As usual, the bystanders are probably portraits in which a strong individuality of character is given with great dignity. The other fresco of this chapel, "St.

* There is no positive proof that the Chapel of Sta. Fina was painted at this precise time, but I am willing to accept the date given by the latest authorities of Vasari which is inferred from the existence at San Geminiano of frescoes executed by Mainardi in 1487. The relics of the Saint were deposited in the chapel in October, 1488, probably immediately after its completion. (Peccori, *Storia della terra di S. Geminiano*.) A fresco of "The Annunciation" in the oratory of San Giovanni in San Geminiano, attributed to Ghirlandaio, is dated in 1482.

Gregory appearing to Sta. Fina and announcing her approaching death," appears to have been for the most part, if not entirely, the work of his scholar, Mainardi.

The frescoes at San Geminiano were probably executed during a temporary absence from Florence, for Ghirlandaio must have commenced his last and most important undertaking, the decoration of the choir in Sta. Maria Novella, as soon as he had finished the Sassetti Chapel. That great work appears to have been completed in 1490, after a lapse of between four and five years—a short time indeed to accomplish so vast a labour, although he evidently received very considerable assistance in it from his numerous scholars.* Vasari relates how Ghirlandaio came to be employed on this work. The walls of the choir had been originally painted by Andrea Orcagna, one of the most accomplished artists of the fourteenth century, but owing to the bad condition of the roof the frescoes had already, in the middle of the following century, suffered very considerably from the damp. Many enlightened citizens of Florence desired either to have those interesting works restored, or to see the chapel adorned anew by some painter worthy of the task. But the family of Ricci, who had a proprietary right in this part of the church, were not only unwilling to incur the necessary cost themselves, but even refused to allow others to pay it for them, fearing lest their coats of arms and shields should be removed, and their hereditary claims to the chapel should be subsequently disputed.

* According to Vasari the work occupied him four years, and was finished in 1485; but it would appear from contemporary evidence that he is mistaken. The frescoes were probably commenced in that year, and completed in 1490, when the chapel was first exposed to public view (*Le Monnier's edition of Vasari's Lives*, vol. v. p. 72, note).

At length Giovanni Tornabuoni, to whom Ghirlandaio had brought the letters of recommendation from his brother, the merchant established at Rome, prevailed upon them to allow him to undertake the repairs at his own expense, on the condition that when they were finished the Ricci escutcheons should be placed in the most honourable and conspicuous part of the choir. A solemn contract to this effect was accordingly entered into. Giovanni selected Ghirlandaio to execute the work, and agreed to pay him one thousand two hundred gold ducats, promising to add two hundred ducats more in the event of his being well satisfied with it. The painter did execute his commission to the satisfaction of his employer, but the latter hinted that he would be much pleased if he were released from his promise to pay the additional sum. "Domenico," says his biographer, "who esteemed glory and honour far more than riches, consented at once to abandon any further claim, declaring that he was much happier in having given satisfaction by his work, than he should have been in receiving the two hundred additional ducats for it."

When the repairs of the chapel were complete, Giovanni Tornabuoni fixed on the outer pilasters two great escutcheons in stone, bearing the arms of his own family and those of the Tornaquinci, with which it was allied. But the arms of the Ricci he only placed in a very small shield on the tabernacle of the Sacrament over the high altar. So that when the public were first admitted to the chapel the Ricci in vain sought for their armorial bearings, and loudly complained to the Council of Eight of the breach of contract, demanding immediate justice. However, they obtained no redress, as it was proved to them that their arms, being close to the most holy

Sacrament, occupied, according to the terms of the agreement, the most honourable place in the chapel. This anecdote is a curious illustration of the manners of the time, and of the estimation in which the arts were at that period held in Florence.

It may be gathered from what Vasari says, but his statements are not always entitled to much confidence, that Ghirlandaio adopted the same subjects, as had been previously painted by Orcagna—following that painter in their arrangement. The four divisions of the groined roof contain the four evangelists. On that part of the end wall behind the high altar not occupied by the great window, he painted figures of various saints, protectors of the city of Florence, events from the history of St. Dominic, and St. Peter Martyr, John the Baptist in the desert, the Annunciation, and, as he had done in the Sassetti Chapel, portraits of his patrons, Giovanni Tornabuoni and his wife. The side walls he covered with fourteen frescoes—seven on the right hand representing the history of the Virgin, and seven on the left representing the history of John the Baptist. It would be out of place to enter into a minute description of each of these very remarkable pictures. I trust the time will come when the Arundel Society will be able to obtain copies of them, and to make known and accessible, as it ought to be, this mine of artistic wealth. These frescoes show to a remarkable degree all the great qualities which Ghirlandaio possessed as a painter. In them he has displayed an infinite variety of resource, and a rich and poetic imagination, in which he is not even excelled by that most imaginative of painters, Benozzo Gozzoli, who is frequently apt to be extravagant and fantastic, and to overcrowd his compositions

—faults never committed by Ghirlandaio, who is always simple and dignified. The exquisite grace and beauty of his female figures—qualities in which his easel pictures are sometimes deficient—give an additional interest to these works. The “Visitation of St. Elizabeth” and the “Birth of the Virgin,” two of the finest compositions in the series, may be cited as instances. He has, as usual, introduced into nearly every fresco the portraits of distinguished citizens and of men illustrious in his day.* Many of the heads are masterpieces of the most elevated portraiture. The drapery is disposed with that breadth and grandeur in the folds, yet with that perfect ease, which marks the best period of the Florentine school. The compositions are carefully studied, and the figures most skilfully, but naturally arranged. There is no violence, nor yet any tameness, in the action. The story is always simply, yet well and clearly told. In the background there is great variety, elegance, and richness of detail, chiefly architectural. The buildings are of the “renaissance” style, and are cleverly drawn in perspective. The landscapes which occur in a few of these frescoes are painted with his usual feeling for nature in her most poetic aspect. In execution these great works show the most complete mastery over the technical part of his art—bold resolute drawing, admirable

* Amongst them may be mentioned those of Marsilio Ficino, Poliziano, Cristofano Landino, and the celebrated Greek, Demetrius Chaleondylas (according to good authority, however, the portrait is that of Gentile de’ Becchi, bishop of Arezzo, and not of Demetrius), his own portrait, those of his master Baldevinetti, his brother David, his brother-in-law and pupil Bastiano Mainardi, Ginevra de’ Benci (a celebrated beauty of the day, but who had been already married for some years when the fresco was painted), and of many members of the Medici and of the Tornabuoni and Tornabuoni families. Old drawings, made at the time, and indicating the original of each portrait, still exist. One is in the possession of the Tornabuoni family (Le Monnier’s edition of Vasari’s *Lives*, vol. v. p. 76, note).

knowledge of effect, and an excellent colouring. Although they have been exposed to a long period of neglect and wilful injury, to damp, to the fumes of incense and the smoke of torches, and to the ladders, nails, and tawdry hangings used upon nearly every church festival; yet until recently they had preserved much of their original beauty and freshness. They have suffered more during the last two or three years than probably at any other period; but they are still noble monuments of the best period of Italian fresco painting.*

Although Ghirlandaio had acquired great skill in the use of tempera (he never, as far as I am aware, painted in oil), his altar-pieces and easel pictures are much inferior to his frescoes. He would seem to have paid little attention to this branch of his art,

* About three years ago the monks of the Convent of Sta. Maria Novella, having waxed rich, determined to restore their church. They set about the business after the usual fashion, and what with repainting many of the frescoes, restoring the architecture, destroying or removing some of the most interesting monuments, and selling others, they have done their best towards utterly spoiling one of the finest ecclesiastical buildings in Italy. Fortunately, the hand of the restorer was stayed, partly I believe through a protest I made against these barbarous proceedings, before it had reached Ghirlandaio's frescoes, but not before it had hopelessly injured some of the finest by Filippino Lippi. But even Ghirlandaio's were left exposed to all the damp, dust, and dirt which would accumulate in an edifice undergoing almost complete internal reconstruction, and to such injuries as might befall them from poles, ladders and the various incidents of workmen's proceedings. They were only covered up with canvas in the month of November last (1860), when the interference of the Florentine Academy of Fine Arts, I believe, had shamed the monks into doing something to preserve these treasures. But they had already suffered very severely and irreparably. Such is the fate of some of the noblest legacies bequeathed to Italy by her great men! It is much to be feared that what with the suppression of the convents, decreed by the new government, and what with restoration and neglect, little will be left of these precious relics in a few years. A successful struggle for political regeneration is not, unfortunately, always favourable to the preservation of monuments of early art. The removal of the high altar in Sta. Maria Novella will, however, allow Ghirlandaio's frescoes to be better seen than formerly.

and to have executed few such works with his own hand. He never refused a commission, but ordered his apprentices and pupils to accept any work that might be brought to his shop, were it even to paint the hoops for women's baskets, declaring that if they would not undertake it, he would himself. This he did, not from any love of gain, but because he was unwilling that any one, however humble, should depart from his door dissatisfied.* If this statement be true, it would seem to prove that he left most of his shop business—the painting of easel pictures—to his scholars. His “tavole” frequently show elegance of design, richness and variety of composition, a very careful and conscientious execution of details, and that individuality of expression in the heads—generally portraits—which is so strikingly displayed in his frescoes. But the colouring is often dull, heavy, and leaden, sometimes raw and harsh. He is fond of violent contrasts in the flesh tints, using bright red too freely for this purpose. He improved, however, in this respect in his latest pictures, which are much richer and more harmonious in colour, approaching to those of his son Ridolfo. His earlier and later styles may thus be distinguished. The types he chooses for the Virgin, the Infant Christ, and angels, are generally wanting in elevation, beauty, and religious sentiment; and his representations of these sacred personages are consequently inferior to those of many of his contemporaries who were, in other respects, painters of less merit. But the saints he introduces into his pictures are generally of a higher character, and show his feeling for dignified yet individualised expression. The extremities of his figures—their hands and feet—are not always drawn with

* Vasari, *Life of Ghirlandaio*.

care and correctness. These various defects seem to show that whilst he made the designs for his pictures himself, he was in the habit of leaving their execution to others. This is not surprising, considering the large number of great and important works upon which he was occupied during the short period of ten years.

Whilst many pictures in public and private collections are attributed to him, genuine works by his hand are comparatively rare. Most of those which are authentic, and are of any importance, bear dates, like his frescos, between 1480 and 1491. None are signed. The principal with which I am acquainted are the following :

In the Gallery of the Uffizi at Florence an altar-picco, formerly in the Church of the Calza, greatly praised by Vasari as a perfect example of tempera painting. This picture was bought for the National Gallery, and having been seized by the late Grand Ducal Government, became the subject of an angry diplomatic correspondence.* It represents, according to the conventional

* In the last catalogue of the Uffizi Gallery, it is described as having been 'purchased' by the Tuscan government. It was in fact seized, and *not* paid for, in contravention of their own law—a very small annual sum being only promised to the owners. A true and genuine love of art, which sought to retain in Italy, by fair and just means, its best monuments, would be a very praiseworthy sentiment; but a mere petty jealousy of foreigners, which enacts or threatens laws prohibiting the exportation of all pictures and other works of art without special permission, whilst some of the finest paintings are allowed to decay and perish, deserves anything but commendation. The Italians should remember that, after all, they owe the preservation of many of their most valuable monuments of art to the liberality of enlightened strangers; that long before they appreciated the remains of those ancient works, which they had left to fall to decay, German, English, and French writers and travellers had understood their value, and had called public attention to them, and that much of the interest and sympathy now felt for Italy in her vital struggle may be attributed to the knowledge and admiration of her, founded

treatment of the early masters, the Virgin and Child enthroned amidst saints. The colours are raw and wanting in harmony ; though this is partly owing, perhaps, to injudicious cleaning. The details are painted with great minuteness and care. The picture is not dated ; judging from its execution, it appears to belong to about the same period as the fresco of "St. Jerome" in the Ognissanti (1480).

Also in the Uffizi, a large circular picture, representing the "Adoration of the Magi ;" a rich composition, full of figures, some of much beauty. The colour is rather leaden and heavy. In the distance is a view of Venice with the grand canal, very minutely and skilfully painted, apparently showing that the painter had visited that city. Dated 1487.

A circular picture in the Pitti Palace, of smaller dimensions, similar in subject and nearly similar in the details, many of the figures being repeated ; apparently painted about the same time.*

upon the evidence of the genius and greatness of her sons in former ages, displayed throughout the civilised world by works of art. It is scarcely creditable to their authors to see the constant repetition, in modern Italian books, of the stereotyped phrase that "Italy has been despoiled of such and such a picture by the Ultramontane barbarians ;" nor can I admire the answer given by an Italian statesman to one who remonstrated against a law which prohibited the exportation of paintings—"We would rather that our pictures should rot upon the walls than that they should go to England." It is very doubtful how far the accumulation of ancient pictures in public galleries will contribute to the formation of truly great painters in Italy. The result has hitherto not been favourable to the development of genius. Italian artists have scarcely escaped becoming a mere race of copyists. No man, not being an Italian, can feel a greater love for Italy, a deeper interest in her prosperity, and a sincerer desire for her future greatness, than myself. It is in this spirit that I have made the above remarks.

* A third picture of the same character, painted for a member of the Tornabuoni family, and afterwards in the Palazzo Pandolfini, is said to be in England.

Two pictures in the gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts at Florence. A "Nativity," dated 1485, originally the altar-piece of the Sassotti Chapel, contains some fine characteristic heads—one amongst them the painter's portrait—but has defects of colour. It is remarkable for a very elaborate landscape background, treated in a somewhat conventional manner, the high lights being touched with gold—a practice often followed by Ghirlandaio in his easel pictures and even in his frescoes, as in the "St. Francis receiving the stigmata," in the Sassetti Chapel; although Vasari says that he was the first to abandon the use of gilding in painting, skilfully imitating the effects of gold by the simple means of colour. A second altar-piece, representing "The Virgin and Child between angels and saints," without date, but probably painted about the same time, with a "predella" of five small subjects very gracefully and delicately treated. The details are careful, and some of the heads fine, but there is a want of dignity and religious feeling in the Virgin, and the colour is leaden.

The large altar-piece of "The Adoration of the Magi," in the Church of the Esposti (or Foundling Hospital)—Ghirlandaio's most important work of this nature in Florence, dated 1488. It is very rich in figures, and contains many graceful and pleasing groups, and some fine portrait heads. In the background is a distant view of a city, the sea and a harbour with shipping, poetically conceived, but somewhat hard in treatment. The details are most conscientiously and minutely executed. The general tone of colour is more harmonious than that of most of his pictures; but the flesh tints, which are curiously hatched, are still too green and leaden; and the heads of the Virgin and Child, the types of which

are scarcely worthy of the subjects, are somewhat disfigured by ruddy cheeks.

An altar-piece in the Church of San Giusto, at Volterra, representing Christ in glory and saints beneath, judging by its colouring, of his later time.* It has been badly restored. A second picture, painted, according to Vasari, for the same church, has disappeared.

In the sacristy of the Church of San Martino at Lucca, an altar-piece, unfortunately much injured by a restorer.

An altar-piece painted for Carlo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini, still preserved in the town-hall of that city.

A picture in several compartments, painted about 1490, for the altar of the choir in Sta. Maria Novella. Part is now in the Pinacothek at Munich, and part in the Royal Gallery of Berlin. It was finished by his brothers David and Benedetto, to whom may probably be attributed the whole of one compartment—the "Resurrection of Christ," in the Berlin Collection. The grand individualised character of the heads, and the broad drapery in ample folds in those parts which are evidently by Ghirlandaio, as the panels with the single saints at Berlin, resemble his frescoes. The colour is also remarkably rich and harmonious, and furnishes an

* Vasari states that this picture was ordered by Lorenzo the Magnificent, when the convent was held 'in commendam' by his son Giovanni de' Medici, afterwards Pope Leo X., who was created a cardinal in 1488, and received holy orders four years later.

excellent example of his latest and best style.* The hands and feet are very carefully drawn. The centre subject, representing the Virgin in glory and the Archangel Gabriel, John the Baptist, St. Dominic, and John the Evangelist, is at Munich.

In the Louvre "The Visitation of the Virgin," commenced for the church of Cestello, and finished, according to Vasari, by his brothers David and Benedetto. The colouring is defective, but the figures are very graceful. Dated 1491, and consequently the latest authentic work by the master.

I know of no genuine work entirely by the hand of Ghirlandaio in England, although several pictures in private collections are attributed to him.† The beautiful picture of "The Virgin and Child between two angels," in the National Gallery, assigned to him, is undoubtedly by another and very different painter.‡

Ghirlandaio's drawings and sketches, of which many are preserved

* Other pictures in the Berlin Gallery are attributed to Ghirlandaio. A "Virgin and Child between saints" may be from a design by the master, but the execution and colour betray a scholar. The 'Pietà,' in the Pinacothek at Munich (No. 538), though assigned to him, is undoubtedly by Filippino Lippi.

† Dr. Waagen mentions two portraits, conjectured to be those of Maria Tornabuoni and her husband, in the collection of Mr. Drury Lowe, which may be by him.—(*Galleries and Cabinets of Art in Great Britain*, vol. iv. p. 498).

‡ It is difficult to determine who may have been the painter of this picture. It closely resembles in many respects, especially in the colour of the flesh and the peculiar character of the hands, a picture of three saints in the Uffizi, which is described by Vasari as having been painted by Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo, for the Church of San Miniato. That picture is, however, in oil. Some have attributed the National Gallery picture to Pesello or to Pesellino, of whom little is known. By the same hand are undoubtedly other works in public and private collections, as in Lord Ward's, Mr. Barker's, &c. In delicacy and refinement of colour, and in a peculiar beauty in the type of the Virgin and Angels, the painter, whoever he may have been, was perhaps superior to Ghirlandaio.

in the Uffizi and elsewhere, are marked by great vigour and decision of outline, and are usually on grey or bluish paper, and much relieved with white. They show a careful and conscientious study of nature and of detail, especially of drapery, which is marked by great breadth of folds admirably disposed. They correspond in these respects with his frescoes, some of the original sketches for which are to be seen in the Florentino Gallery.

The frescoes in Sta. Maria Novella appear to have been the last great work of painting undertaken by Ghirlandaio.* After he had finished them he seems to have devoted himself to mosaic, for which he had probably contracted a taste when with Alessio Baldovinetti, who was one of the most esteemed workers in this material of his day. Ghirlandaio was wont to say that mosaic, from its durability, was better adapted than any other material to the expression of the painter's ideas.† In 1490 he executed in it

* Other frescoes by Ghirlandaio mentioned by Vasari, and which have perished, or the dates of which are unknown, are: the front of the principal chapel of the Badia of Settimo, near Florence, no traces of which exist; a chapel in the villa of the Casso Macharelli, also near Florence, where some remains are still to be seen; on the arch over the high altar of the Duomo of Pisa, several graceful angels, recently restored, and consequently destroyed; another fresco at Pisa, on the façade of the "Opera," or Warden's office, of the Duomo, destroyed; a "St. George and the Dragon," in the Church of the Ognissanti, and a St. Michael in full armour, over the entrance to the cemetery of Sta. Maria Nuova, Florence, both destroyed; a hall in the Spannocchi Palace at Siena, with many subjects in tempera, of which no trace or record remains (it is very doubtful whether any such work was executed. An "Annunciation," over the entrance to the Church of Orbatello, dated 1485, is attributed to him by the last editors of Vasari's Lives; and a circular fresco in the Chapel of the Bargello, Florence, dated 1490, is also assigned to him, but doubtfully. Of several pictures described by Vasari, some have been lost, whilst others may still be preserved in private collections. Amongst the most important which have disappeared is one, originally at Pisa, representing St. Sebastian and St. Rocco, and bearing the arms of Leo X.

† "Usava dire Domenico la pittura essere il disegno, e la vera pittura per la eternità essere il mosaico." Vasari, Vita del Ghirlandaio.

a lunette representing the "Annunciation," over one of the northern entrances to the Duomo of Florence,—the only authentic example remaining of his skill in this art. It is very graceful in design, and is distinguished by that beauty and minuteness of detail which characterise his paintings. According to Vasari, he had commenced the decoration, in the same material, of the Chapel of San Zanobi, in the Duomo, when he was induced by Lorenzo the Magnificent, who became his surety for 20,000 ducats, to complete the mosaics of the façade of the Duomo at Siena, and died whilst engaged in that undertaking. But this is an error on the part of Vasari. Documentary evidence proves that it was Domenico's brother David and not himself who was employed at Siena. It appears, from the archives of the cathedral of Orvieto, that in 1492, and in the following year, if not at a later period, he was engaged in repairing and renewing the mosaics which adorned the exterior of that splendid building.* We have no further record of the painter from that time to his death. Vasari places that event in 1495, but there is reason to infer that it occurred two or three years later, when Ghirlandaio was in the 46th or 47th year of his age.†

Ghirlandaio had received a commission in 1491 to paint a picture for the high altar of the Church of the Palco, near Prato, which he failed to execute, and which was consequently transferred to Filippino Lippi. In the same year he left the "Visitation," now in the

* Vasari's *Lives*, Le Monnier's edition, vol. v. p. 83, note. An entry of a payment of forty-two ducats to him occurs in the books of the cathedral under date of the 20th April, 1493.

† The last edition of Vasari gives 1498 as the date of his death, but it may have occurred a little earlier, perhaps in 1497. The declaration of the property left by him at his decease, made by his brother in 1498, does not prove that he actually died in that year.

Louvre, unfinished. His career as a painter seems therefore, as far as can be ascertained from authentic records, to have been limited to ten years—from 1480 to 1491, during which period he executed a larger number of great and important works than probably any other painter who ever lived, not even excepting his prolific contemporary, Benozzo Gozzoli.

He had many scholars. The most eminent was Michelangelo, who from him learned the first rudiments of his art,* and who, according to tradition, assisted him in the frescoes of Sta. Maria Novella. As he was born in 1475, and apprenticed to Ghirlandaio on the 1st of April, 1488, he was but a boy when those great works were painted. The firm and vigorous drawing of Ghirlandaio, and his dignified conception and rendering of character had no doubt their influence upon the youthful genius of the illustrious artist, but that genius was destined to create a new era in art, and to be the representative of a new order of ideas and sentiments. Whatever Michelangelo may have learnt from his first master—and he could not have remained long under him—there are certainly few, if any, traces of Ghirlandaio's influence in such of his early works as are known to us. He seems to have struck out a new path for himself, in the technical, as well as in the other branches of his art, almost before he had emerged from boyhood.†

* Condivi.

† The well-known unfinished picture, now in the possession of Lord Tannton, and generally believed to be an early work by Michelangelo, was at one time attributed to Ghirlandaio; this may show that there are *some* traces of Ghirlandaio's manner in it, but it certainly bears no resemblance to any of that master's works with which I am acquainted.

Those pupils who most closely followed in Ghirlandaio's footsteps were his brothers David and Benedetto, painters of no great merit, but whose works frequently pass for those of Domenico; his brother-in-law, Bastiano Mainardi of San Geminiano, who executed frescoes in his native town and in Florence (as in the Church of Santa Croce), very closely imitating the style of his master, but wanting his vigour and invention; his son Ridolfo, who, as a painter of easel pictures and altar-pieces, acquired great fame, and imitated his father in the strongly individualised and dignified character of his heads, but exceeded him in the richness and power of his colouring; and Francesco Granacci, who, with much grace of drawing and a refined feeling for colour, was deficient in originality of invention and in a dignified conception of character. To these Vasari adds Niccolò Cieco, Jacopo del Tedesco, Jacopo dell' Indaco, and Baldino Baldinelli, of whose works little or nothing is known.

Ghirlandaio would seem to have died in poverty, for according to Vasari the family of Tornabuoni, probably ashamed of the meanness of Giovanni in the matter of the Sta. Maria Novella frescoes, sent him one hundred ducats during his last illness. He was greatly deplored by the city of Florence as a distinguished and worthy citizen, and by his pupils as a kind and affectionate master. He was buried with much pomp in the public cemetery of the Church of Sta. Maria Novella. But his remains were afterwards removed by his son Ridolfo to a more honourable site in the outer cloisters, where they were deposited in a separate tomb amongst those of the most noble families of his native city. In the arched recess over his sarcophagus were placed his arms, consisting of an

armed horseman, and his portrait, which has long since perished. An epitaph, in the inflated style of Italian mortuary inscriptions, recorded his fame as a painter.*

Vasari's account of Ghirlandaio, and Vasari had known many of his contemporaries and pupils, conveys the impression that he was a gentle, honest, conscientious, and industrious man,—an impression fully borne out by the character of his works. As a painter in fresco he stands almost unrivalled in the technical part of his art. The rapidity and certainty of his execution were surprising. He was heard to declare, says his biographer, that he should rejoice if he had to paint with stories the whole circuit of the walls of Florence. The excellent preservation of such of his works as have not been exposed to wanton injury or neglect, was owing to his habit of finishing them "in buon fresco," or true fresco, on the wet surface, not using tempera for this purpose like many contemporary artists.† This practice requires great decision of execution—a ready hand to obey a clear intellect. His outline is firm, his forms graceful, and his composition skilful. The fertility of his imagination and his power of arrangement and combination are strikingly shown in his great series of frescoes in Sta. Maria Novella. He was so correct of eye that he would design the most difficult architectural perspective without rule,

* Fineschi, *Memorie sopra il cimiterio antico della chiesa di S. Maria Novella*. The epitaph was as follows:—

Troppo presto la morto
Troncò il volo alla fama che alle stelle.
Pensai, correndo forte,
Passar Zeusi e Parrasio, e Scopa, o Apelle.

† Vasari's *Life of Ghirlandaio*.

compass, or measure ; and a drawing that he thus made of the Colosseum is said to have been so accurate, that it could be measured in all its parts by mere reference to a human figure which he had introduced as standing in the centre of the building.*

Although in his religious pictures he still adhered, to some extent, to the conventional mode of arrangement followed in the previous century, especially in the grouping of his figures and in the draperies of sacred personages ; in his frescoes he abandoned it altogether, and sought to represent nature with the utmost truth — a distinction between easel pictures and wall-paintings not unfrequent amongst his contemporaries and the great painters who immediately succeeded him. He avoided as much as possible all violence of action and contortion, all exaggeration and affectation of expression, giving a dignified, calm repose to the scene he represents, which might degenerate into monotony, were it not combined with great variety, and an elevation of character that cannot fail to impress and interest the spectator. In a just disposition of light and shade and in the perspective of colour, especially in his heads, he was much in advance of Masaccio, who had not succeeded in giving that entire and complete relief to his forms which in Ghirlandaio's best works, and still more in those of Filippino Lippi in the Brancacci Chapel, carry almost to the highest perfection the art of imitation. As a portrait painter he holds a very high rank. Whilst adhering to truth and nature, he always gives to his portraits the highest elevation and dignity of

* Vasari's *Life of Ghirlandaio*.

which his subject is susceptible. In this respect he is entitled to our admiration, and presents one of the best models for imitation in this most important branch of painting. He seldom attempted the nude, not having attained in it that proficiency which distinguishes the later painters of the Florentine School. Even the extremities—the hands and feet—of his figures, as I have already remarked, are not always correctly drawn. Lanzi says that he was the first amongst the Florentines, who, by the means of true perspective, arranged his compositions properly and gave them depth.*

Ghirlandaio may be entitled to the place which an eminent modern critic has assigned to him “amongst the greatest masters of his own or any other age.”† Still he was undoubtedly inferior to Masaccio in original genius, and to Fra Angelico in that deep and fervent love of purity and holiness, which appeals to men’s best feelings and their best sympathies. His merits as a painter consist in his having carried almost to the highest perfection of which it was capable that new school of painting which had been founded in the beginning of the fifteenth century by Masolino and Masaccio. He gave the best expression of which his art could then admit, to the best phase of the condition of society in which he lived. Florence had risen to the first place amongst the Italian states in material prosperity, and in the power based upon great commercial activity and riches, when Ghirlandaio began to paint. Her wealth, her vast trade, the luxury of her citizens, were

* *Storia Pittorica*, vol. i. p. 73.

† Kugler, *Schools of Painting in Italy*, vol. i. p. 207. Vasari calls him “uno de’ principali e più eccellenti maestri dell’ età sua.”

gradually leading her to forget the most precious heritage of a people—their liberties. Lorenzo the Magnificent, whilst contributing to her splendour at home and her power and influence abroad, was fast undermining her free institutions, to which she owed her real greatness. Yet there were still living in Florence great and good men who had watched the growth of her freedom, and were ready to make any sacrifice in its defence. The conspiracy of the Pazzi, planned after the barbarous fashion of the times, but directed against the usurpation and tyranny of the Medici, had but recently failed. But the childlike religion and political enthusiasm which had distinguished the fourteenth century, and which inspired the verse of Dante and the pencil of Giotto, had passed away. The imaginative and superstitious spirit which characterised that century was everywhere yielding to one more rational and matter-of-fact, founded upon a deeper study of the writings of the ancient philosophers, a better acquaintance with the laws of nature, and a more extended intercourse between nations. In this new age men displayed a sense of their dignity by polished manners, by richness of costume, by costly living, by magnificent ceremonies, and by the foundation of splendid monuments and a munificent patronage of the arts, not for great national or religious purposes as in the previous century, but for the fame or aggrandisement of themselves and of their families.* These are the leading characteristics of this period of Florentine history. They are precisely those which find their best exponent, in painting, in Ghirlandaio. In his frescoes we have that mixture of reality and truth with the supernatural, in the treatment of religious

* We have an illustration of this in the quarrel about the costs of arms between the Tornabuoni and Ricci, when the choir of Sta. Maria Novella was painted.

incidents, which serves to show their divine nature, and yet to give them the appearance of actual events of the day. The portrait-like character both of the actors in these scenes, and of those who are introduced into them as spectators, contribute still more to produce this effect. Even in his altar-pieces, or what are termed "devotional" pictures, that deep religious feeling which gives almost an unearthly appearance to the representations, by the early painters, of the Virgin, of the Saviour, of angels, and other sacred personages, is replaced by a worldly and common-place character, which sometimes almost verges on coarseness. By their rich costume, by the calm dignity of their expression and attitude, and by the grave and solemn part they appear to play in the scene depicted, he admirably portrays the great men of his day, to whom he thus dedicates a worthy monument—the last protest, as it were, against the ambition of the Medici, who extinguished, with their country's liberties, those noble and generous qualities which, with all his faults and his vices, distinguished the citizen of free Florence.

To those who would study the history of art in a philosophical spirit, the interest and importance of Ghirlandaio's works rest upon the view that may be thus taken of them, as well as upon their real beauties and the influence they exercised over the Florentine school of painting; that school which numbered amongst his contemporaries the Pollaioli, Sandro Botticelli, Andrea Verrocchio, Filippino Lippi, and Luca Signorelli; which produced Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Fra Bartolomeo, and Andrea del Sarto, and formed the maturer stylo of Pietro Perugino, Pinturicchio, and the immortal Raphael himself; a school which in its highest

development in Ghirlandaio's time held the grand and just middle place between the conventional and the academic in art—the high land, as it were, between the rise of the fourteenth century and the fall of the sixteenth.

A. H. LAYARD.

THE END.